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Holland and the War

A SERMON

BY THE

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HOLLAND AND THE WAR

“A little one shall become a thousand, and a small one a strong nation.” Isaiah 60:22.

“The inverted bowl we call the sky,” of which Omar Khayyam sings, fits so perfectly on the bowl, right side up, we call Holland, that the foreigner feels in Holland like a colossal fly imprisoned between two saucers. Looking up from a level thirty to sixty feet below the sea, the rim of the bowl cuts the sharp skyline beneath which the waves roar as if eager to devour either the lid or the body of the bowl.

The history of this shut-in land has been, in academic language, a prolonged and unintermittent “bowl fight.” “Which side was to get the bowl and keep it?” was the question. Was it to belong to the farmer or to the sailor, to the cows or to the fishes, to the Netherlanders or to Neptune? This long, ceaseless struggle has not exhausted but stimulated the Hollander. The salt of the sea has kept his courage fresh and his spirit strong. The Dutch farmer is as bluff, hearty and vigorous as the Dutch sailor.

But this struggle has settled forever the physical aspects of the country. In these low, fat fields, fat cattle, owned by fat men, milked by fair, if not fat, maidens, will always feed.

From these fields brooms have swept back the sea which Xerxes in vain commanded his soldiers to do; but the Dutch have used the broom more scientifically than the Persian autocrat. They have planted broom corn on the dykes in such a way that it binds the soil in a living network from which structure the seductive waves cannot tear it. Dotting these fields are numberless windmills, whose long, flapping arms are frightful enough in the twilight to keep a Don Quixote perpetually in the saddle, with lance in rest ready to ride down upon these monsters, evidently bent on devouring the fat cattle and the fair maidens.

Here and there, in the corners of these fields, myriads of tulips, with colors more exquisitely gorgeous than any oriental carpet, push their heads through the rich soil like fairies delivered by the sun god from the dark persons of dusky slave dealers. Here peasants toil with all the zest with which the tillers of the fields in other lands make soberly merry on feast days and church festivals. Here the fisher-folk, in some towns, at least, wear curious garments, richly ornamented, as if expecting, momentarily, to join the other guests at a wedding which never takes place.

"This land beyond the sea" is the antithesis of the Amalfi, of which Longfellow loved to dream, but it, too, has a charm which has inspired poets and painters. It has a history as splendid and heroic as Amalfi's. "A little one, here, has become a thousand, and a small one a strong nation." Only 150 miles long and 120 broad, Holland has a population of but six millions, yet its colonies number thirty-eight millions possessing 730,000 square miles, in Java, Sumatra and Borneo, of the East Indies.

Holland's struggle with the sea, in which this gigantic bowl of milk and cheese and tulips was the prize, with the possession of a highly profitable trade thrown in, was a stimulating sport compared with her struggle with Spain for "a place in the sun," with liberty to move around in that place, for work or for worship, as she might choose.

In the Sixteenth Century Holland was the Italy of Northern Europe, not only because some of her canalized cities like Amsterdam were suggestive of Venice, but because of her *naissance*, her birth—it was not a *renaissance*, as in Italy—in science, art and commerce.

Falling by, for her unfortunate marriages, into the merciless hands of the Holy Roman Emperors, Holland found herself at last in the clutches of Charles V, the Hapsburg autocrat. He was the most powerful man in the world at that time. He was the antagonist of Luther, and of liberty in every form in both church and state. Inheriting the Netherlands, he rubbed his hands with the cruel delight the sea must have felt when it swept away the dikes, and saw many fair gardens at its mercy.

Charles was religiously a multi-millionaire, but morally he was a pauper. He had religion, such as it was, to give away to those who were already satisfied with the one they had, and who respectfully declined that which he attempted to force on them with devices in which the Spanish Inquisition was expert. He pacified Ghent as Louvain and Termonde were pacified a few months ago, but showing more foresight he impoverished without destroying, having in mind the possibility of many profitable repetitions.

His son, Philip, lacked his father's courage and power to compel fear if not respect, but Philip's bigotry was a much more real thing than his father's. Philip was less

hypocritical than Charles, though not less immoral, but his consistency was unquestioned. He hated all schismatics with a holy hatred so complete that it made no exceptions for Protestant generals who might have been extraordinarily useful to him in certain exigencies.

Philip's chosen emissary in Holland was the Duke of Alva. He was, spiritually and Satanically, bone of Philip's bone and flesh of his flesh. Between Alva and the sea, the Hollanders never hesitated when the choice was left to them—that may have been the origin of the adage: "Between the devil and the deep sea."—The sea was cruel, but with no such refinement of inconceivable cruelty as Alva.

In the coils of this dragon Holland was the damsel about to be crushed, and the St. George to give his life-blood to deliver her was William of Orange, as noble a knight as ever rode to the rescue of distressed womanhood. William was either unknown to Lord Byron or forgotten by him, or, it may be the noble Lord could not think of a good rhyme for William, or he never would have made our Washington the one and only name in all the list of the world's worthies, unstained by "guilty glory" or "despicable state."

Motley may have painted William, as Cromwell's court painter wished to paint the Protector, "without wart or wrinkle, or any such thing." But after all necessary or possible deductions, Motley's hero stands in the center of that bowl, against which the sea and Spaniard raged, one of the most splendid specimens of humanity in the world's history.

William fell like Moses on the borders of the Land of Promise. Philip, who laughed out loud when he was told about St. Bartholemew's Day, must at least have smiled

with devout satisfaction when he heard that his hired assassin had earned the gold for which he had sold himself to Satan.

Three other shining names are written high on Holland's roll of fame: John Van Barneveldt, the victim of religious bigotry, called Protestant, which was only a little less repulsive than the bigotry of Philip, himself; John De Witt, the victim of political bigotry, which may be as deadly but is not so virulent as the religious form; William III, great-grandson of William the Silent, the husband of Mary, daughter of James II of England, and so related to Great Britain by marriage as Charles and Philip were to Holland, he might have proved as great an incubus to his relations-in-law as the Spanish kings. But to Macaulay and all lovers of popular rights William's coming to England was like his great-grandfather's coming to Holland from the German city of his birth.

England was then eagerly scanning the horizon for a knight of the right kind, and at first no one thought he might be hidden by the rim of that bowl. The same dragon that had so nearly crushed Holland held England in his coils. Religious liberty and every other kind of liberty was gasping. Then came William and Mary and James, a pale reproduction of Philip, slunk away with his Romish retinues to the safe shores of France.

That Great Britain, since the revolution of 1688, has marched at the head of the army of progress, is in no small degree due to William and Mary, who broke the shackles from the souls of men and turned slaves to soldiers.

America's debt to Holland, while not so vast as that of Great Britain, is at least so large that we gratefully confess

we never expect to pay it. The Dutch colonists coming to our shores in 1614, were of less heroic stature mentally and spiritually, if not physically, than the Pilgrims who arrived at Plymouth in 1620, or the Puritans who came to New England ten years later. The Dutch colonists were looking for liberty, not to worship, but to barter.

Holland had sent Henry Hudson, the English sailor, in 1609, to find a northwest passage to India. That supposed passage, like the supposed Elixir of Life and the Fountain of Youth and the Philosopher's Stone "led countless generations on," many to death, and a few like Hudson to glory. Five years after Hudson sailed up the river a fort was built at Albany. Nine years later a trading station was established on Manhattan, and called New Amsterdam. It consisted of a flagstaff, a tall warehouse, a church, and a dozen or so one-storied houses with Dutch roofs.

Captured by the English in 1664—the English thought it most incongruous for these foreigners to cut in between their colonies in New England and New Jersey—the name was changed to New York. But the Dutch flavor, like the scent of the roses in the broken vase, hung around it still. Dutch names are stamped, not only on the river itself, but on many of the streets of the two cities at either end, and on the villages between. Dutch customs, Dutch stability and steadfastness, sometimes to the verge of stolidity, have been inwrought into the character of the people.

The Dutch Reformed Church preserved all that was best in the mother church, and added the fire of missionary zeal. It is one of our aggressive Protestant churches. It has no intention of repeating the mistake the Dutch made in some colonies, when they built great churches but no schools, and compelled the natives to attend the services, as

Francis Xavier compelled the natives of India to be baptized, and both Protestant and Roman Catholic, alike, reverted, when the restraint was removed, to their original Paganism. This American Dutch church has adopted modern methods with lines of circumvallation for slow but sure approach to the forts and fortresses of the enemy. They have built churches, chapels, schools, academies and hospitals for the conquest of ignorance, superstition and sin.

This reformed and Americanized church has carried the war even into the heart of Asiatic Mohammedanism. Within a few days march of Mecca, on the shores of the Red Sea, where Mohammed drove his camels, the sappers and miners of this salvation army are at work. These inheritors of the traditions, if not the fortunes, of the Dutch colonists are in that land of terrible desert and unendurable heat, because they were inspired by the heroism of a young Englishman, who gave his life to the seemingly forlorn hope of an Arabic mission.

The youngest son of Lord Kintore, an elder in the Scotch Free Church, the Honorable Ion Keith Falconer, was a giant physically and a prizewinner in intercollegiate, athletic, and intellectual contests. A brilliant career was open to him, both politically, diplomatically, and academically. To such qualities as his, combined with such influence as he could exert, everything is possible in Great Britain.

Hearing a call that rang as loud and clear in his soul as the call that made Saul of Tarsus a missionary to the Gentiles, young Falconer went to Arabia and there, after two years' service, he died, the glorious death of a martyr, for Christ's sake. "Of all pulpits," says John Ruskin,

"from which the human voice is ever set forth, there is none from which it reaches so far as from the grave." Falconer's voice, heard only in subdued tones in the lecture halls of Cambridge, now carried from the grave across the sea, and the young Americans of the Reformed Church heard his challenge, took up his sword, and are today fighting the battle from which he was summoned to his coronation.

It is not defeat, wounds and death that appall; it is meaninglessness—the paralyzing conviction that the game is not worth the candle. Self-sacrifice for a great and glorious cause is never useless, never too costly, is never regretted by those who make it and by those who understand it. The sword that cuts the life of faith and hope is the sword swung in the hand of hate or ambition, of pride or envy; the sword whose swish sounds in the ears of five or six million soldiers in Europe tonight.

To die fighting, as Falconer died, to make men free, to break down prison doors, to open all God's world to God's children, to educate the ignorant, to care for the sick and wounded in hospitals more comfortable than any oriental palace, to tell the dying of an eternal life of endless growth and blessedness, is to make death so glorious that the splendor of it illuminates life's most commonplace details. But to die as fearless men are dying today in the trenches of France and Poland, and in the passes of the Carpathians, who do not know why or for what they are dying, is a holocaust of horror over which coming generations will wring their hands in shame and pity.

Little Holland peaceful and contended, asking only to be let alone, cultivating with plodding Dutch assiduity, all those arts of peace, which produce the plenty and prosperity,

in which all the world must share, is a high Rembrandt light, increasing the intense density of the shadow that darkens the rest of Europe where the great powers are struggling to become greater by destruction and slaughter.

Twice the nations have heard a call to a Peace Conference in Holland's modest "House in the Woods," at the Hague. The Palace of Peace which American generosity built not far away for future conferences is desolate and silent, but a lute-like note sounds from the cities, towns and villages of Holland like the subdued music of the Bells of Is, calling Emperors and Kings to stop the mad and murderous onslaught of soldiers, and imitate Holland in her "more excellent way," and no longer cast covetous eyes on the vineyards of any Naboth.

"A little one shall become a thousand, and a small one a strong nation," not by conquest, spoliation and robbery, but by righteousness, fair dealing and a patriotism so broad as to include all nations made by God of one blood.

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